

## CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method for use on a computer having a graphical operating environment, comprising:  
providing a collection of items within a container, the container having a background  
5 appearance; and  
displaying a graphical preview of at least one item on the outer appearance of the  
container,  
thereby enabling a computer user to more easily identify the contents of the container  
without opening the container.
- 10 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising, prior to displaying the preview:  
enumerating the items that exist within the container;  
determining whether a graphical preview can be generated for each enumerated item; and  
generating a list of items for which a graphical preview can be generated.
- 15 3. The method of claim 2, further comprising:  
selecting, from the generated list, a desired number of items to display on the background  
appearance based upon a sort criteria.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein the sort criteria selects the items based upon those items  
which were most recently modified in some way.
5. The method of claim 3, wherein said displaying step includes sizing the preview and  
20 locating the preview on the background appearance in a desired location.
6. The method of claim 3, wherein said displaying step further includes determining  
whether a graphical preview image has previously been generated and stored, and if so,  
displaying the previously generated preview.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the preview is a thumbnail image of an item contained within the container.
8. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the steps recited in Claim 1.
- 5 9. A method in a computer system for displaying a collection of content items within a container, comprising:
- displaying a background appearance for the collection of items;
  - determining if any of the collection of items can be graphically represented; and
  - if any of the collection of items can be graphically represented, displaying on said
- 10 background appearance a graphical preview of at least one of said items that can be graphically represented.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein the container is a folder and the background appearance is that of a closed file folder.
11. The method of claim 9, wherein the container is a folder and the background appearance is that of a photo-album.
12. The method of claim 11, wherein said at least one graphical preview is a preview of an electronic picture contained within the folder.
13. The method of claim 9, further comprising displaying a textual message in addition to the background appearance and the graphical preview.
- 20 14. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the steps recited in Claim 9.
15. A computer system for displaying a collection of items on a display using a graphical operating environment, comprising:

an item collection manager for providing a collection of items within a container, the container having a background appearance; and

a container display provider for displaying a graphical preview of at least one item on the outer appearance of the container,

5 thereby enabling a computer user to more easily identify the contents of the container without opening the container.

16. A computer system for displaying a collection of items on a display using a graphical operating environment, comprising:

a background appearance rendering component for the collection of items;

10 a graphical preview rendering component for determining if any of the collection of items can be graphically represented and for rendering a graphical preview, on the background appearance, of at least one of any of the collection of items that can be graphically represented.